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ABSTRACT

A survey of experienced teachers sought to determine the extent to which they felt they were required to do more paperwork than before the passage of Georgia's Quality Basic Education Act of 1985 (QBE), whether they felt burdened by it, and who they felt is responsible for requiring it. It also gathered information on teachers' specific paperwork complaints and their suggested remedies. The 487 teachers who responded to the survey were sorted according to their answers in order to identify those who: (1) had problems with paperwork; (2) felt that the paperwork required of them was different from two years ago; and (3) cited specific problems. Teachers' responses indicated frustration at having to neglect their teaching because of increased paperwork requirements, and an underlying sense that it was distrust that forced them to have to document so many transactions. Unnecessary or redundant paperwork was deplored. The state was believed to be the main source of increased paperwork requirements. Suggestions were made to reduce, simplify, or eliminate paperwork, and to assist teachers to cope with present requirements. (JD)

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# TEACHER PAPERWORK SURVEY

Georgia Department of Education

March 1988

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PAPERWORK SURVEY OF EXPERIENCED TEACHERS
March, 1988

A survey of experienced teachers was conducted by the State Department of Education (DOE) during the latter half of March 1988. Its purpose was to determine the extent to which experienced teachers feel they are required to do more paperwork than before the passage of Georgia's Quality Basic Education Act of 1985 (QBE), whether they feel burdened by it, and who they feel is responsible for requiring it. It also gathered information on teachers' specific paperwork complaints and their suggested remedies.

The sample was chosen by selecting every third school listed in the Georgia Public Education 1988 Directory. Telephone contacts were made to each school, mainly by DOE division directors, and the principal was requested to allow an experienced teacher to speak with the caller.

Five hundred thirty-nine calls were made, resulting in a final group of 327 respondents whose characteristics and responses matched the purpose of the survey.

CONTACTS ATTEMPTED

| | N |
|---|---|
| On Spring Break | 16 |
| Declined to Participate | 15 |
| Did Not Return Call | 5 |
| Beginning Teacher or Person Who Changed Job in Last Two Years | 16 |
| Experienced Teachers | 487 |
| Total Attempted | 539 |

The 487 experienced teachers who responded were sorted according to their answers to the first three questions, in order to identify those who (a) have problems with paperwork, (b) feel that the paperwork required of them is different from two years ago, and (c) cite specific problems.

The first question on the survey was: "Do you personally have a problem with paperwork?" The second question: "Are you completing any paperwork this year that you did not complete two years ago?" The third question: "What is the specific paperwork that is causing you a problem?" Some teachers replied that they are not having a problem--and although the paperwork they are required to do is different from that of two years ago (prior to QBE implementation), they cite no specific problems. Others said that they are having a problem, but that it is no different from two years ago. A complete analysis of perceived problems follows:

PERCEIVED PROBLEMS

| Question 1 | Question 2 | Question 3 | N |
|---|---|---|---|
| Yes | Yes | Yes | 327 |
| Yes | Yes | No | 0 |
| Yes | No | Yes | 30 |
| Yes | No | No | 22 |
| No | Yes | Yes | 44 |
| No | Yes | No | 7 |
| No | No | Yes | 3 |
| No | No | No | 50 |
| Uninterpretable | | | 4 |
| | | Total | 487 |

Although 21 percent of teachers initially said they have no paperwork problems, about half of them then went on to cite specific problems they are experiencing. Thus, only ten percent reported no problems at all. Sixty-seven percent (327 teachers) answered yes to the first two questions and, in addition, cited specific problems. Since this group is of greatest interest for the purposes of the survey and is of sufficient size to yield reliable results, the responses of these 327 teachers are reported in the remainder of the report.

Experienced teachers feel they have paperwork problems in the following areas:

TYPES OF PAPERWORK PROBLEMS

| | Percent |
|---|---|
| Lesson Plan Requirements | 52% |
| Attendance/Enrollment Reporting | 50% |
| Remedial/Compensatory/Special Ed. | 44% |
| Student Testing/Evaluation | 37% |
| State Standards | 24% |
| Student Records | 15% |
| Other Instruction-Related Paperwork | 9% |
| Inventories | 7% |
| Personnel Development | 6% |
| Collecting/Accounting for Money | 6% |
| Miscellaneous Other | 22% |
| "No Particular Thing, It Just Adds Up" | 12% |

(Percents do not add to 100 because most teachers report more than one source of their problems.)

A more detailed break-out of these categories better illustrates the particular problems teachers are experiencing.

DETAIL OF PAPERWORK PROBLEM TYPES

| | N | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Lesson Plans | 171 | 52% |
| Unnecessarily Detailed Plans Required | (110) | (34%) |
| Correlating Lesson Plan Objectives with BCC, QCC, CRT, Guides, etc. | (50) | (15%) |
| Lesson Plans/State Standards | ( 6) | ( 2%) |
| Duplication of Lesson Plans for Media Center Visits | ( 5) | ( 2%) |
| Attendance/Enrollment | 164 | 50% |
| FTE | (81) | (25%) |
| Attendance Registers | (36) | (11%) |
| Maximum Class Size | ( 7) | ( 2%) |
| Out-of-Class Activity (Non-Instructional Time Policy) | (17) | ( 5%) |
| Other Attendance[1] | (23) | ( 7%) |

[1]Permission to leave school; tardy reports; notification to central office of students out more than five days; field trip forms, etc.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Remedial/Comp. Ed./Special Ed. | 145 | 44% |
| Remedial/Compensatory Ed. | (47) | (14%) |
| Student Support Teams | (29) | ( 9%) |
| Special Education | (69) | (21%) |
| Student Evaluation | 120 | 37% |
| Testing | (38) | (12%) |
| Grading Papers | (14) | ( 4%) |
| Other[1] | (68) | (21%) |
| Standards Documentation | 77 | 24% |
| General | (71) | (22%) |
| Lesson Plans/Standards | ( 6) | ( 2%) |
| Student Records | 49 | 15% |
| General | (30) | ( 9%) |
| Health | ( 2) | ( 1%) |
| Requests for Student Info. | ( 5) | ( 2%) |
| Discipline | (12) | ( 4%) |
| Other Instructional | 29 | 9% |
| Homework (not grading) | ( 3) | ( 1%) |
| Textbook Adoption | ( 3) | ( 1%) |
| Curriculum Revision | (11) | ( 3%) |
| Lab Records | ( 8) | ( 2%) |
| Other | ( 4) | ( 1%) |
| Inventories[2] | 22 | 7% |
| Personnel Development | 20 | 6% |
| Teacher Evaluation | (13) | ( 4%) |
| Other Personnel Evaluation | ( 2) | ( 1%) |
| Inservice Education | ( 7) | ( 2%) |
| Collecting/Accounting for Money[3] | 21 | 6% |
| Miscellaneous | 71 | 22% |
| Parent-Teacher Contacts | (12) | ( 4%) |
| Student Scheduling | (12) | ( 4%) |
| Surveys | (11) | ( 3%) |
| Assurances | (12) | ( 4%) |
| Southern Assoc. Accreditation | (12) | ( 4%) |
| Permission Slips | ( 1) | ( 0%) |
| Fairs/Contests | ( 2) | ( 1%) |
| Middle School Planning | ( 5) | ( 2%) |
| Advisement System | ( 3) | ( 1%) |
| Federal Impact Aid | ( 1) | ( 0%) |
| "No Particular Thing, It Just Adds Up" | 40 | 12% |

[1]Report cards; grade distribution sheets; progress reports to parents; math and reading cards; grade books.
[2]Textbooks; number of pieces of paper used; equipment; rooms occupied.
[3]Lunch; school pictures; yearbook; charity drives; graduation fees, etc.

Question 4 was: Who do you think is responsible for requiring each of these paperwork items? Since respondents did not always associate a particular source with a particular problem, results can only be reported overall. Again, percents do not add to 100 because teachers mention more than one source of their paperwork problems.

PERCEIVED SOURCES OF PAPERWORK PROBLEMS

| | N | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| State Department of Education | 185 | 57% |
| (including State Standards) | (29) | ( 9%) |
| QBE (Governor, Legislature) | 137 | 42% |
| Local System | 67 | 20% |
| Federal | 15 | 5% |
| Special Education | 8 | 2% |
| School (Principal) | 6 | 2% |
| Public | 6 | 2% |
| Self | 5 | 2% |
| SACS | 4 | 1% |
| Don't Know/Not Sure | 23 | 7% |

The primary source reported is the State Department of Education, which is named by more than half of the respondents. It is interesting to note, however, that 23 teachers (7%) are not sure who is responsible for their problems.

Questions 5 and 6 asked how to reduce or eliminate the paperwork load. Teachers' suggestions fall into two large categories. The first relates to simplification, reduction, or elimination of current requirements. The second relates to helping teachers cope with current requirements.

Since 45 respondents complained about paperwork requirements being redundant or duplicative, many suggestions relate to avoiding duplication through simplification, coordination, or elimination.

SIMPLIFY

Lesson plan requirements (45). Teachers particularly object to having to write detailed lesson plans and to relate lesson objectives explicitly to various sets of test or curriculum objectives which apparently have different coding systems. Nineteen teachers mention having to correlate lesson plans with the BCC or QCC. Teachers don't see the need to re-write the objectives in the teacher's manual. Several complain about having to write the same objectives over again for the media specialist when a visit to the media center is planned.

Special education/compensatory education reporting (18). In addition to the IEP, there are special education records for referral, classroom evaluation, requests for assistance, and documentation of instruction. Similarly, teachers feel oppressed by the amount of documentation required for Chapter I, the Remedial Education Program, and the Student Support Team process. They see a wasteful amount of redundancy in these processes and in the required forms.

Other desired simplifications are: attendance records (4), state standards (1), discipline forms (1), testing records (1), health records (1), TPAI process (1), "all forms" (1).

REDUCE

Frequency of reporting (10). The primary item mentioned is the number of FTE counts, with specific suggestions to drop the December count.

Amount of testing (6).

Class size (16). (Smaller classes generate less paperwork.)

The number of things that have to be documented (9).

Evaluation of experienced teachers (3).

Other non-teaching duties, e.g., bus duty, playground duty, lunchroom duty (3).

Other reductions desired are standards documentation (2) and the frequency of form changes (1).

ELIMINATE

The item mentioned most often is attendance registers (14), followed closely by FTE (9). "Senseless paperwork" (6) and lesson plans (5) are also cited, followed by one or two votes each to eliminate the media center request form, the uninterrupted time-on-task record, the non-instructional time record, lesson plan verification, the field trip form, inventory forms, the school lunch count, the classroom inventory, the CRT, the mandated curriculum, QBE, school-level standards, state standards, Chapter I pull-out programs, all non-teaching duties, all non-teaching-related forms, teacher evaluation, beginning teacher evaluation, administrator evaluation, peer evaluation, the vocation MIS, and the six-class requirement for all students.

The second major category of suggestions focuses on how to help teachers cope with the paperwork they now have:

HELPING TEACHERS COPE WITH PAPERWORK

| | N | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Have Someone Else Do It | 143 | 43% |
| Clerical Staff | (64) | |
| Paraprofessionals/Aides | (60) | |
| Counselor Aides | ( 2) | |
| "Someone Besides Teachers" | ( 5) | |
| System-Level Staff | ( 3) | |
| Special Ed. Staff | ( 3) | |
| Parent Volunteers | ( 1) | |
| Lead Teachers | ( 1) | |
| Subject Area Specialists | ( 1) | |
| Counselors | ( 1) | |
| In-School Suspension Staff | ( 1) | |
| Special Team of Homeroom Teachers | ( 1) | |
| Eliminate Duplication | 46 | 14% |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Give Teachers Additional Time/Money | 40 | 12% |
| Planning Time | (27) | |
| Work Days/Release Time | (12) | |
| Additional Pay | ( 1) | |
| Use More Computer/EDP Technology[1] | 40 | 12% |
| Give Teachers More Professional Trust and Require Less Documentation | 16 | 5% |
| Involve Local Systems/Teachers in Data Collection Decisions | 15 | 5% |
| Improve Teachers' Understanding of Forms and How to Do Them | 15 | 5% |
| Standardize/Stabilize Forms | 12 | 4% |
| Improve Time Factors | 5 | 2% |
| Require No Paperwork of Teachers That Is Unrelated to Teaching | 5 | 2% |

[1]Report cards, scheduling, attendance registers, grading, FTE, instructional management, standards records, lunchroom records, test results.

Summary and Conclusions

The theme running through these responses is teachers' frustration at having to neglect their teaching because of increased paperwork requirements, and their underlying sense that it is distrust which forces them to have to document so many transactions. They seem to be particularly upset about paperwork which is unnecessary or redundant, such as detailed lesson plans that make them re-write objectives and activities from the teacher's manual. Many teachers also have to correlate their lesson objectives with a number of other sets of objectives, such as those in curriculum guides, or the CRT, or the Basic Core Curriculum. This is especially time-consuming when the various sets of objectives are different and are coded dissimilarly. Teachers are understandably impatient with paperwork for which they see no purpose. They feel that the paperwork essential to good teaching is burdensome enough, without having to complete forms no one ever sees or uses. They feel they are required to do things that serve only to prove that some action has been taken or some fact verified.

Teachers believe the state (DOE, state standards, QBE, the legislature) is the main source of increased paperwork requirements. Their suggestions for alleviating the problem fall into two categories: (a) reduce, simplify, or eliminate paperwork, and (b) assist teachers to cope with current requirements.

Assist teachers to cope with current requirements. If paperwork continues to be so burdensome that teachers feel they don't have time to teach, hire additional clerical help, provide teachers with free periods/release time/work days (to do paperwork), or pay them for the additional hours they have to spend doing it.

Provide some inservice on the purposes of the forms and how to do them. Show how to do them more quickly and efficiently. Teachers say they would feel more cooperative if they understood the forms' purposes.

Get good data processing equipment and software into every school as quickly as possible and teach teachers how to use it.

Ensure that every school has a good photocopy machine and see that it is kept in working order. Some schools apparently still rely on ditto machines.

Simplify the forms. Use a checklist format as much as possible. Use the same form for more than one purpose, e.g., special ed., comp. ed., REP, SST forms. One correspondent is designing a lesson plan form that is largely a checklist. Another showed how IEPs could be made partially into checklists.

Don't change the forms so often. Teachers say that just when they get used to a form, it is changed. Standardize the forms. Some suggest that the state design all forms used in more than one system, e.g., special services referrals, so that when teachers change systems they don't have to learn a new set of forms. Generally, teachers are aggravated by what they see as constant changes in forms or other state-imposed requirements--when they think a job has been done, e.g., revising curriculum guides, it has to be done over. They also wish the state would be very clear and explicit as to what is acceptable.

Coordinate DOE requirements so as to reduce or eliminate duplication of the same information in different formats.